

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7690

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 7714

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PGOV ELAB SP

SUBJECT: NEW HEAD OF GOVERNMENT

REF: A. MADRID 7709; B. TELECON AXELROD-MCCOWN DEC. 29

SUMMARY: FRANCO'S DESIGNATION OF MINISTER OF INTERIOR ARIAS NAVARRO AS NEW PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT TO SUCCEED CARRERO BLANCO ANNOUNCED EVENING OF DECEMBER 29. ARIAS WILL BE FIRST CIVILIAN TO OCCUPY THAT POST IN FRANCO PERIOD. AN EXPERIENCED GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVE, HE IS REPUTED FOR HIS LOYALTY TO FRANCO, ADMINISTRATIVE ABILITY, DEDICATION, LACK OF IDENTIFICATION WITH ANY POLITICAL FACTION AND FIRM ATTITUDE TOWARD MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER. HE WILL TAKE OFFICE JANUARY 2. SPANISH COMMENTATORS AND OUTSIDE OBSERVERS GENERALLY IMPRESSED BY ATMOSPHERE OF NORMALCY UNDER WHICH TRANSFER OF POWER TAKING PLACE UNDER TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES.

1. C*UNCIL OF REALM MET DECEMBER 28 AND DREW UP SLATE

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OF THREE CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT, TO

SUCCEED CARRERO BLANCO. SLATE PRESENTED SAME DAY TO FRANCO. FRANCO'S CHOICE OF CARLOS ARIAS NAVARRO, NOW MINISTER OF INTERIOR, AS NEW PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED EVENING OF DECEMBER 29. IN SPECULATION PRECEDING PRESENTATION OF SLATE BY COUNCIL OF REALM, ARIAS WAS NOT CONSIDERED TO BE AMONG LEADING CONTENDERS BECAUSE OF INDICATIONS THAT AS MINISTER OF INTERIOR HE MIGHT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR LAXITY OF SECURITY MEASURES TO PROTECT CARRERO.

2. ARIAS IS SCHEDULED TO TAKE OATH OF OFFICE ON JAN 2. AT THAT TIME, ALL MINISTERS, INCLUDING ACTING PRESIDENT FERNANDEZ-MIRANDA, WILL FORMALLY VACATE THEIR OFFICE BUT THEY WILL MEANWHILE CONTINUE TO EXERCISE FUNCTIONS IN CARETAKER STATUS. ANTICIPATED THAT NEW CABINET APPOINTMENTS WILL BE MADE IN COURSE OF NEXT WEEK. GENERALLY EXPECTED THAT THERE WILL BE FEW CHANGES, IN ADDITION TO REPLACEMENT OF ARIAS AS INTERIOR MINISTER.

3. ARIAS, 65 YEARS OLD, HAS REPUTATION OF BEING ABSOLUTELY LOYAL TO FRANCO WHOM HE HAS SERVED IN VARIETY OF POSTS OVER LONG PERIOD. IN HIS PREVIOUS POSITIONS (CIVIL GOVERNOR OF LEON, NAVARRA, AND TENERIFE, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SECURITY, MAYOR OF MADRID, AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR) ARIAS DEMONSTRATED EXECUTIVE TALENT, CAPACITY FOR WORK, DECISIVENESS AND FIRMNESS. IN THESE AND OTHER WAYS HE IS VERY MUCH LIKE HIS PREDECESSOR, CARRERO BLANCO. LIKE CARRERO, HE DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE OBSESSIVE AMBITION, BUT HAS CARRIED OUT HIS RESPONSIBILITIES WITH DEDICATION, AND IS NOT IDENTIFIABLE WITH ANY PARTICULAR GROUPING WITHIN NATIONAL MOVEMENT. HE HAS SELDOM VOICED POLITICAL VIEWS PUBLICLY. ARIAS IS KNOWN, HOWEVER, FOR HIS FIRM ATTITUDE TOWARD MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER. HIS APPOINTMENT WILL THUS BE INTERPRETED AS AN INDICATION OF FRANCO'S DECISION TO REASSURE POPULATION OF GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION AND FIRMNESS IN SECTOR OF SECURITY. UNLIKE CARRERO, ARIAS HAS AN OUTGOING PERSONALITY AND HE WAS A FAIRLY POPULAR MAYOR OF MADRID. HE WILL BE FIRST CIVILIAN TO OCCUPY THE POSITION OF PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT UNDER FRANCO.

4. LINE TO BE FOLLOWED BY ARIAS ON CURRENT ISSUES, E.G.
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NOTABLY INCREASED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, IS DIFFICULT TO PROGNOSTICATE PRIOR TO FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT AND TO ITS POLICY STATEMENT. (INDICATIONS WERE THAT CARRERO BLANCO, PRIOR TO HIS DEATH, WAS ABOUT TO PROPOSE LEGISLATION PROVIDING FOR BROADER PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS.) ON BASIS OF PAST ACTIONS OF ARIAS, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT NEW PRESIDENT WILL VENTURE INTO INNOVATIVE DEPARTURES AT LEAST IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE. EXPECTED THAT HE WILL FOCUS

HIS ATTENTION INITIALLY ON CONSOLIDATING HIS GOVERNMENT AND PROMOTING INTERNAL SECURITY. ARIAS APPEARS WELL DISPOSED TOWARD U.S. AND HAS BEEN FRIENDLY AND COOPERATIVE IN RELATIONS WITH U.S. OFFICIALS.

5. SPANISH COMMENTATORS HAVE EMPHASIZED, AND OUTSIDE OBSERVERS GENERALLY AGREE, THAT TRANSFER OF POWER TAKING PLACE IN ATMOSPHERE OF NORMALCY AND IN ACCORDANCE PROVISIONS OF FUNDAMENTAL LAWS. MANY CONSIDER THIS TO BE TEST CASE OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN FRANCO DIES, THOUGH SITUATION WILL NOT OF COURSE BE ANALOGOUS. IN TRADITIONAL END-OF-YEAR SPEECH DEC. 30 (TO BE REPORTED SEPARATELY), FRANCO PRAISED SPANIARDS' CALMNESS AND SOLIDARITY WHICH MADE IT POSSIBLE TO AVOID RECOURSE TO EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES.
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